

November 15, 2018

**Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs regarding Bill 47: Making Ontario Open for Business Act, 2018**

The Association for Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for early childhood educators (ECEs) in Ontario. We support ECEs in their professional practice and advocate for recognition and appropriate compensation for early childhood professionals, so they can provide high quality programs for children and families. Well educated, well paid and competent early childhood educators are fundamental to high quality early years and child care programs that support children and families across the province. Our members work throughout Ontario in programs for young children and their families, including licensed centre based and home based child care, full-day kindergarten, EarlyON programs and as Resource Consultants who provide services and support for children and families with disabilities.

ECEs and early years staff joined workers across Ontario in support of Bill 148, *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017*. Too many ECEs, early years staff, and Ontario workers continue to face low wages in part-time, temporary or contract jobs without employment benefits, workplace protection or the right to form, and keep, a union. For too many Ontario workers, full time work does not guarantee a life above the poverty line and a continued low minimum wage contributes to income and job insecurity. Even with the increasing professionalization of ECEs and the ample evidence pointing to the immense importance of their work for children, families, and society, ECEs have seen a very slow and limited increase in professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits. Low ECE salaries, inconsistent working conditions, and precarious work schedules have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. ECEs are continuing to leave the sector, despite being passionate about their work. It is the experience of many early years and child care programs across Ontario that qualified ECEs cannot be recruited to work in these under-resourced early childhood environments that serve our youngest children. This is having a significant impact on early years staff consistency, program quality, and sector stability that promises to endure for years if it is not addressed now.

The introduction of Bill 47 and concurrent repeal of critical protections established in Bill 148 is deeply concerning to ECEs, early years staff, and workers across Ontario. In particular, the repeal of the minimum wage increase, loss of paid emergency leave, the repeal of equal work provisions, and changes to the *Labour Relations Act, 1995* are of significant concern to the early years workforce and will be discussed below.

### **Minimum Wage**

The AECEO disapproves of the repeal of the scheduled minimum wage increase to \$15/hour. Schedule 1 of Bill 47 outlines the intent to hold minimum wage at its current level of \$14/hour until October, 2020, and following this, allow for adjustments to meet inflation. This decision will have a significant impact on ECEs and the early years workforce, who are already facing persistently low wages across the sector. Sixteen percent (16%) of ECEs

and 57% of early years staff working in licensed child care earn less than \$15/hr<sup>1</sup>. These wages not only fail to reflect the value of the work of ECEs and early childhood educators, they continue to place educators in precarious situations – often requiring working multiple jobs to support themselves and their families. As well, this has significant implications for children, families, and communities, as challenges with recruitment and retention continue to plague early years programs and impact both system stability and program quality.

The AECEO urges the government to reconsider the repeal of minimum wage provisions in Bill 148, and to fulfil the wage increase scheduled for January 1, 2019. As well, we urge the government to commit to address the low wages in the early years sector and continue with plans to implement a provincial wage grid as outlined in *Growing Together, Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy*<sup>2</sup> and recommended by the AECEO in *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*<sup>3</sup>. It is essential for the stability of existing programs and lowering parent fees that this wage grid is publicly funded.

### **Paid Emergency Leave**

As a component of Paid Emergency Leave, as introduced under Bill 148, all workers in Ontario were guaranteed 2 paid sick days. This protection, along with paid leave for illness, injury and death for family members, would ensure that all workers are entitled to a total of 10 paid emergency leave days per year. This provision was a victory for the early years workforce, who are not only working in challenging working conditions which can often cause illness and injury, but as a female dominated workforce are often marginalized in efforts to balance family and work life.

The repeal of paid emergency leave days will significantly reduce the quality of working conditions that ECEs and early years staff so desperately advocated for. ECEs and early years staff across the province are facing varying working conditions and access to health benefit packages. The work of ECEs and early years staff is both physically and emotionally demanding, and often requires caring for young children who are ill. Essential to this work is the ability to feel confident and supported in taking necessary time away from work, and receiving appropriate compensation for this time. As well, the early childhood workforce continues to be predominantly female. As such, they are often balancing the needs of their families and their work, further substantiating the need for access to paid leave.

The AECEO urges the government to revisit the repeal of Paid Emergency Leave in order to protect ECEs and early years staff whose work is essential for children, families, and communities. Further, we recommend developing a base funding approach which enables early years programs to provide decent working conditions to educators while keeping parent fees low<sup>4</sup>.

### **Equal Work Provisions**

Under Bill 148, Equal Work was recognized as an area where workers faced discrimination based on both sex and on employment status. In order to address this, Bill 148 increased protection for workers by ensuring that workers could not be paid differently based on their employment status as 'part-time' or 'contract' for example, when compared to full-time employees fulfilling the same job roles.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education (2018). 2017 Licensed Child Care Operators Survey Report

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education (2018). *Growing Together, Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/growing-together-eycc-workforce-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario [AECEO] (2017). *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*. Retrieved from

[http://www.aeceo.ca/transforming\\_work\\_in\\_ontario\\_s\\_early\\_years\\_and\\_child\\_care\\_sector](http://www.aeceo.ca/transforming_work_in_ontario_s_early_years_and_child_care_sector)

<sup>4</sup> AECEO (2017). *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*.

Many ECEs and early years staff continue to work in part-time, supply, and contract positions. When their qualifications and job roles are of equal value to those working in full-time positions, they deserve to be paid appropriately. For many ECEs and early years staff working in supply, part-time, and contract positions this provision was an important step towards ensuring they are paid for the value of their work. At a minimum, it meant ECEs and early years staff could not be discriminated against based on employment status.

The removal of this provision, as suggested in Schedule 1 of Bill 47, is a step away from protecting our most vulnerable workers. Firstly, by removing the protections for employment status it exposes ECEs and early years staff who do not have access to full-time position to further precarity with respect to their wages. As well, Schedule 1 of Bill 47 threatens existing protections for pay discrimination based on sex. Once again, this is especially concerning for the early years workforce which is predominantly women.

The AECEO is calling on the government to continue the equal work provisions as outlined in Bill 148 in order to ensure equal pay for ECEs and early years staff based on both sex and employment status. As well, the AECEO recommends:

- establishing a publicly funded wage scale which reflects pay equity legislation, and
- implementing a base funding approach to early years programs to ensure that ECEs and early years staff are well-compensated and provided decent working conditions<sup>5</sup>.

### **Changes to *Labour Relations Act, 1995***

Bill 148 introduced several new measures to protect and enable organizing workplaces and ensure fairness in collective bargaining. The repeal of these protections under Bill 47 will create barriers for unionization, which will directly impact ECEs and early years staff. As well, it will jeopardize collective bargaining efforts for those working in unionized settings.

Union density is low in the early years sector. The majority of ECEs and early years staff who are unionized are those who are working in the public school system. ECEs and early years staff recognize the importance of unionization and collective bargaining for ensuring they have power in negotiating and bargaining for professional wages and decent working conditions. The ability to organize and engage in collective bargaining will also contribute to sector stability, as it will reduce the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention by taking a significant step towards ensuring ECEs and early years staff are well-compensated and provided decent working conditions. This, in turn, will reflect in the experiences of children and families, recognizing the irreplaceable role that ECEs and early years staff play in our communities.

The AECEO therefore recommends that the changes suggested in Bill 47 to the *Labour Relations Act, 1995* are repealed and the government continues with the provisions under Bill 148 which would support unionization and collective bargaining in workplaces in Ontario.

### **Summary: AECEO Recommendations**

The AECEO urges the government to reconsider the decision to repeal workers protections as outlined in Bill 47. ECEs and early years staff across Ontario are calling on the government to fulfill their responsibility to workers, children, families and communities. The valuable and socially important work of ECEs and early years staff is threatened by persistently low wages and challenging working conditions. These factors continue to jeopardize system stability as issues of recruitment and retention continue to impact early years programs.

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<sup>5</sup> AECEO (2017). Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector.

While the AECEO recommends a full repeal of Bill 47, we also recommend the following to address wages and working conditions in the early years sector:

1. Develop a new base funding approach to early years and child care programs in Ontario that will ensure quality, affordability and access. A new system of base funding will include substantial increases to operational funding to keep early childhood education and children's care affordable while ensuring professional compensation, good working conditions and supports for registered early childhood educators (RECEs) and early years staff.
2. Implement a provincial wage scale with a \$25/hr minimum for RECEs and a benefit package, including paid sick and personal leave days, for registered early childhood educators. The wage scale must inform base funding, while recognizing the level of education and years of experience for RECEs and staff in accordance with pay equity principles. In the interim, maintain and immediately extend the Wage Enhancement Grant/Home Child Care Enhancement grant to establish a minimum wage of \$25/hr for all RECEs.
3. Develop and implement an Early Childhood Workforce Learning Framework which will enable such quality-related staff supports as paid time for professional learning and expanded opportunities for acquiring and upgrading qualifications.
4. Create practitioner roles and identify educational requirements alongside a career ladder that will strengthen program quality while formally recognizing the value of credentials and experience. This initiative will support the recruitment and retention of registered early childhood educators and provide a greater incentive to make ECEC a life-long career.
5. Change the positions of full-time Designated Early Childhood Educators working in the publicly-funded school systems to year-round and salaried status with compensation commensurate with other full time educators in the public education systems.
6. Commission an external review of the Full-Day Kindergarten educator team and classroom conditions to inform future planning and development.<sup>6</sup>

We are calling on you to reject Bill 47, which will make work more precarious, under the guise of enabling flexibility for the kind of business practices that continue to exert downward pressure on the wages and working conditions of all of us. The bulk of evidence shows that decent work is the foundation of a strong economy, better health outcomes, and reduced inequality. We disagree with those who suggest otherwise.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario fully supports the recommendations and amendments put forward in the submissions by Workers' Action Centre and Parkdale Community Legal Services, as well the submission made by the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Sincerely,



Laura Coulman, RECE and Interim President, AECEO

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<sup>6</sup> AECEO (2017). Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector.